A SERMON,

PREACHED AT

THE ANNUAL VISITATION

OF THE

ARCHDEACON of SURREY,

AT

ST. SAVIOUR'S, SOUTHWARK,

October 5th, 1796.

Publiſhed at the Requeſt of the Archdeacon, &c.

[Price One Shilling.]

5

Miniſters of the Goſpel Witneſſes for Chriſt.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE

THE REVEREND JOHN CARVER, B. L. L.

ARCHDEACON of SURREY,

AT HIS VISITATION,

HELD IN THE

Pariſh Church of St. SAVIOUR, *Southwark,*

OCTOBER 5th, 1796,

BY W. WINKWORTH,

CHAPLAIN OF ST. SAVIOUR'S, SOUTHWARK; AND LECTURER OF ST. PAUL'S, SHADWELL.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE ARCHDEACON, AND OTHERS OF THE CLERGY THEN PRESENT.

A true Witneſs delivereth Souls. *Prov.* xiv. 25.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,

And ſold by DILLY, in the Poultry; MUGGERIDGE, in the Borough; and MATTHEWS, in the Strand.

1796.

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1796.

TO THE

REV. JOHN CARVER, B. L. L.

ARCHDEACON OF SURREY;

AND

THE REVEREND THE CLERGY OF THE DEANERY

OF SOUTHWARK,

THIS SERMON IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THEIR HUMBLE AND AFFECTIONATE

SERVANT AND BROTHER,

WILLIAM WINKWORTH.

St. Saviour's Church Yard,
October 20th, 1796.

SERMON.

ACTS V. 31, 32.

HIM HATH GOD EXALTED WITH HIS RIGHT HAND, TO BE A PRINCE AND A SAVIOUR, FOR TO GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL, AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS; AND WE ARE HIS WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS.

THESE words were ſpoken by St. Peter to the Jewiſh Council; they are part of an apology, which he felt it his duty to make for himſelf, and his brethren the Apoſtles, who oppoſed the injunctions of their rulers, by preaching the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt unto the people.

The High Prieſts and Elders were greatly alarmed at the progreſs of the Chriſtian doctrine, which the Diſciples, after the day of Penticoſt, ſo boldly propagated, and ſo forcibly confirmed, by appoſite quotations from the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament, proving their divine miſſion by miracles: they therefore uſed all their craft and authority, to ſtop the ſpreading of the new opinions, as they affected to call them. To this end they put them in priſon; but the Lord ſent his angel and releaſed them, charging them to perſevere in their duty, by going to the temple, and to "ſpeak to the people all the "words of this life."* They readily obeyed, without any fear of conſequences, not doubting but their

* Verſe 20.

Heavenly

Heavenly Maſter would deliver them from the unjuſt threatenings of their tyrannical ſuperiors, whom, upon this occaſion, it would have been wicked to obey. However, theſe oppoſers of the truth of God, like perſecutors of every age, did not readily give up the diabolical cauſe in which they had engaged; and therefore, once more hale theſe faithful ſervants of God before them; who being ſet as culprits at the bar, were thus addreſſed, in the name of the Council:* "Did not we ſtraightly command "you, that you ſhould not teach any more in this "name? and behold, ye have filled Jeruſalem "with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's "blood upon us." To whom Peter, as the mouth of the reſt, replied, with a holy firmneſs: "We "ought to obey God rather than men. The God "of our fathers raiſed up Jeſus, whom ye ſlew and "hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with "his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour; for "to give repentance to Iſrael, and forgiveneſs of "ſins; and we are his witneſſes of theſe things; and "ſo is alſo the Holy Ghoſt, whom God hath given "to them that obey him."

That part of the ſpeech which I have choſen for our preſent meditation, may be conſidered—

Firſt, As deſcriptive of the dignified character of Chriſt, in his exalted ſtate, "a Prince and "a Saviour."

Secondly, As exemplifying his gracious diſpoſition in that ſtate, by freely beſtowing benefits upon the ſons of men, which are eſſential to their preſent and

eternal felicity, "giving repentance and forgiveneſs "of ſins."

Thirdly, As aſſerting that the Apoſtles, and conſequently all ſucceeding preachers of the Goſpel, are witneſſes of the dignity, authority, and grace, of Jeſus Chriſt, to mankind, "we are his witneſſes of theſe "things."

The epithets, Prince and Saviour, here given to Chriſt, appear applicable to him in his mediatorial capacity; he having fulfilled the conditions of the covenant, by aſſuming human nature; rendering a perfect obedience to the divine law; and ſuffering the full penalty juſtly due to offending man, claims his reward. The claim is admitted, and he is exalted to the poſſeſſion of his promiſed kingdom, expecting the "Heathen for his inheritance, and the "utmoſt parts of the earth for his poſſeſſion."*

The ſceptre is therefore in his hand, and he will exerciſe ſovereign authority, till all God's purpoſes, through his incarnation, are fully accompliſhed, and the final deſignation of all rational and accountable creatures ſettled; then his mediatorial kingdom will be given up, and "God will be all in all."†

But I wiſh to conſider the term "Prince" more extenſively and particularly: the ſcriptures apply it to Chriſt, in three ſeveral views, each of which has a dependence on the others, and which jointly eſtabliſh the moſt important doctrines of Chriſtianity: he is there ſtiled the "Prince of Life;" the "Prince of Peace;" and the "Prince of the kings of the earth."

* Pſalm ii. 8. † 1. Cor. xv. 28.

1. The word prince, whenever appropriated to Chriſt, ſignifies his being poſſeſſed of ſupreme authority; conſequently, when applied to life, imports that the life of man, in every view of it, is under his abſolute controul, and the diſpoſal of it at his ſole pleaſure. Is not the preciſe time of every man's exiſtence, both as to the beginning, continuance, and end, according to his wiſdom? Can any reaſon be aſſigned, why any particular individual now living did not exiſt one or more centuries ago? or Why the moment of his appearance was not deferred to ſome future period? None can be urged; but we know from revelation, that in "him was life, "and the life was the light of men;"* and in "him "we live and move, and have our being:"† alſo, that with "Him are the iſſues from death,"‡ he having the "keys" of the whole inviſible world.§

A practical deduction may not here be improper, viz. that no man has power over his own life; and that it is the duty of every one to uſe the means of divine appointment for the prolongation of it, and patiently wait till his change come. To be impatient with life, merely becauſe of its inconveniencies; or perhaps only from the apprehenſion of the failure of thoſe accommodations, which human vanity and ſelf-indulgence call neceſſary, is impious, and argues an atheiſtical mind, as alſo a cowardly, and, in ſome inſtances, a cruel heart, in leaving to want and infamy a helpleſs offſpring, by the moſt deſparate and fouleſt of deeds, ſelf-murder.

We

* John, i. 4. † Acts, xvii. 28. ‡ Pſalms, lxviii. 20. § Rev. i. 18.

We have no power over our own lives, or the lives of others, except by delegation in certain caſes, for the general good of ſociety, or the vindication of God's moral government of the world, by puniſhing atrocious and incorrigible offenders: yet it is a matter of much lamentation, that the divine code is ſo overlooked by legiſlators, who inflict the moſt awful of all human puniſhments for crimes which are not ſo heinouſly marked by the law of God, whilſt others are committed almoſt, if not altogether, with impunity, though expreſsly threatened with the utmoſt ſeverity by the "Judge of all the earth:"* and to this inequality of puniſhment, and inattention to Revelation upon this point, may be attributed the inefficacy and multiplicity of our public executions.

Again, as "Prince of Life," Chriſt is to be conſidered as the ſource of ſpiritual life. The ſtate of man, ſince the fall of Adam, is a ſtate of ſpiritual death, being totally deſtitute of any good principle, and even averſe to ſpiritual actions and enjoyments. The following ſcriptures are deſcriptive of this ſtate: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the "ſpirit of God;"† "the carnal mind is enmity "againſt God;"‡ His heart is deſcribed, as to its ſuſceptibility of divine impreſſions, as a "heart of "ſtone;"§ deceitful above all things, "and deſpe-"rately wicked:"‖ yea, our Lord aſſerts that it is the fountain of every abomination.¶ In a word,

 man

* Gen. xviii. 25. † 1. Cor. ii. 14. ‡ Rom. viii. 7. § Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ‖ Jer. xvii. 9. ¶ Matt. xv. 19.

man is "conceived in ſin, and brought forth in "iniquity;"* and as to his moral powers, dead to God in "treſpaſſes and ſins."† Now Chriſt is the author of ſpiritual life in him; the quickner of dead ſouls; the creator of the new man; the fountain of life. Hence he ſays, I am the "life of the world;‡ "I am the bread of life;§ I am the way, and the "truth, and the life.‖" And St. Paul, relating his own experience, ſays, "I am crucified with Chriſt, "nevertheleſs I live; yet not I, but Chriſt liveth in "me; and the life I now live in the fleſh, I live by "the faith of the Son of God."¶ All theſe, and many more paſſages of a ſimilar import, are evident proofs of the neceſſity and efficacy of the grace of Chriſt, in delivering ſinners from the bondage of corruption; reſtoring them to the divine image in which they were originally created, cauſing the ſeeds of "righteouſneſs and true holineſs" to be ſown in their hearts; that, from a living principle, they may "walk in newneſs of life, and bring forth fruit unto "God."**

Life, in the ſacred oracles, is further applied to the reſurrection of the body; and from the power of Jeſus we are taught to look for this awful and important event. The Son of God, and the Son of Man, will, at the final day, iſſue forth his royal mandate, and prove to the whole univerſe, that "he is the "reſurrection and the life;"†† for, at his command, in

* Pſalms, li. 5. Ephe. ii. 1. ‡ John, vi. 51. § John, vi. 35. ‖ John, xiv 6. ¶ Gal. ii. 20. ** Rom. vi. 4. †† John, xi. 25.

in a moment, in the "twinkling of an eye,"* the many millions of the human race, ſome of whom will have ſlept for ages in the ſilent grave, will immediately come forth: the whole world will be inſtantly reanimated, and "appear before the judg-"ment ſeat of Chriſt,"† and receive from him their proper ſentence of bliſs or woe, which will never be reverſed, altered, or mitigated: when the injured and afflicted righteous will be avenged and comforted, ſhining with inexpreſſible glory, in the kingdom of their Heavenly Father; "but the fear-"ful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and mur-"derers, and whoremongers, and ſorcerers, and "idolaters, and all liars;"‡ yea, the wicked and impenitent of every claſs, "will be turned into hell, "with all the people that forget God."§

Chriſt is moreover to be conſidered as the ſole procuring cauſe of eternal life; for this is "life "eternal," ſavingly and experimentally to "know "him,"‖ it being the free "gift of God through "him,"¶ or for his ſake. But as we are yet to view him as the "Prince of Peace," this branch of our ſubject may, perhaps, with more propriety be diſcuſſed, while we proceed to inveſtigate the import of this pleaſing title.

2. By peace, I underſtand peace with God; reconciliation; pardon of ſin; being made a child of God; the enjoyment of his love; acceſs with boldneſs to the throne of grace; confidence in his friend-

* 1. Cor. xv. 52. † 2. Cor. v. 10. ‡ Rev. xxi. 8. § Pſal. ix. 17. ‖ John, xvii. 3. ¶ Rom. vi. 23.

friendſhip and ſupport; and a hope of his everlaſting favor. The terms pardon, peace, reconciliation, &c. naturally lead us to conceive, that there is ſomething wrong on the part of man; that God is angry with him; that there is a painful diſtance between the parties; that ſome offence has been committed, which muſt be forgiven, or man cannot in any meaſure be happy. To elucidate this, the voice of ſcripture, and the voice of conſcience, both concur in declaring, that man being a tranſgreſſor of that law which is "holy, juſt, and good,"* is a rebel againſt God, becauſe the law is every way proper for God to enjoin; and contains every thing ſuitable to man's nature and happineſs; but he wilfully refuſes to conform to the Divine precept; withdraws his affection and allegiance from his rightful ſovereign, and thereby neglects the means of his own comfort and felicity: every ſalutary reſtraint he rejects with diſdain, indulging fleſhly luſts; loving the world and the things thereof as his chief good; evidently ſhewing that the "love of God is not in him:"† his ſtate, in conſequence, is a ſtate of condemnation; the threatenings of God's righteous vengeance hang over his head: "the wages of ſin" are his juſt due; and he has nothing finally to expect, on his own account, but "indignation and wrath, tribulation, "and anguiſh, for evermore."‡

In this wretched condition the Goſpel finds him, and propoſes a ſuitable remedy, aſſuring him, that "Chriſt

* Rom. vii. 12. † 1. John, ii. 15. ‡ Rom. ii. 8, 9.

" Chriſt hath made peace through the blood of his " croſs;"* that " he died for his ſins;† ſuffering " the juſt for the unjuſt to bring ſinners to God,‡" in a way of acceptance and peace; and that " whoſoever believeth in him ſhall not periſh, but " have everlaſting life."§ And to deter him from having any " confidence in the fleſh," declares that there is " ſalvation in no other; for there no other " name under Heaven, given amongſt men," but only the name of Jeſus, whereby they muſt be ſaved.‖

But I haſten to remark, that Chriſt is called " the " Prince of the kings of the earth."¶ If I miſtake not, this auguſt diſtinction imports, that all the affairs of men are under his management and controul. In other words, he is the Sovereign Lord in Providence; the abſolute governor of the univerſe.

By kings, in the paſſage quoted, we muſt include all who exerciſe civil and ſovereign authority, ruling over any body or community of men, whether great or ſmall, though they be diſtinguiſhed by different appellations: theſe men ſeem to act merely according to their own pleaſure, and appear the diſpenſers of good or evil, ſolely to accompliſh their own wicked or noble deſigns. But the holy oracles teach us, that they are only inſtruments in the hand of Chriſt, to fulfill his counſels, either as executioners of his vengeance, to inflict puniſhments upon ungodly nations, or individuals; or, as the " miniſters " of

* Col. i. 2. † 1. Cor. xv. 3. ‡ 1. Pet. iii. 18. § John, iii. 16. ‖ Acts, iv. 12. ¶ Rev. i. 5.

" of God, for good to them that do well."* The ſceptre of power is therefore frequently put into the hands of ambitious, wicked, cruel, and even blaſphemous tyrants, by the Lord himſelf, who being deſtitute of every principle of equity or kindneſs, neither heſitate, or are reſtrained by human feelings, from carrying fire, ſword, and famine to a people devoted to deſtruction, for their incorrigible wickedneſs. But when his chaſtiſements, through them, have had the deſired effect, and the tranſgreſſors are brought to contrition and repentance, he reſtrains their ſavage ferocity, " putting his hook in their noſe, and his " bridle in their lips;"† turning them about at his pleaſure, ſaying to them, as he does to the ſea, " hitherto ſhalt thou come, but no farther."‡ What an important view does this give us of the hiſtory of the world? And how humiliating to reflect, that the chief accounts of our ſpecies are only recitals of crimes and puniſhments.

The concluſion naturally ariſing from what has now been ſaid of our bleſſed Redeemer, is, I preſume, already anticipated, viz. that " He whoſe we " are, and whom we profeſs to ſerve," is " over all " God bleſſed for ever.§ The Lord and giver of " Life," natural, ſpiritual and eternal, of the ſoul and body, here and hereafter, muſt certainly be more than a *creature*. He who has made a full and complete atonement for ſin, has procured peace for offending rebels;

* Rom. xiii. 4. † 2. Kings, xix. 28. ‡ Job. xxxviii. 11. § Rom. ix. 5.

rebels; has redeemed immortal ſouls from everlaſting ruin, and brought them to a confident expectation of future and perpetual bliſs, diſarming death and hell of all their terrors, ſurely, muſt be more than a mere man; for we are infallibly aſſured, "no man can, by any means, redeem his brother, or "pay to God a ranſom for him."* But ſeeing Chriſt hath paid the ranſom price, and finiſhed the great work of man's ſalvation, it may fairly be inferred, that he is almighty. Does he hold the reins of univerſal government, diſpoſing of kings and kingdoms, with all their ſubjects, according to the "counſel of his own will?"† What mind, but the mind of God, is capable of executing ſuch a charge? And what power, ſhort of omnipotence, is able to accompliſh ſuch vaſt and multitudinous objects?

I will not detain you by making any particular remarks on the word "Saviour," partly becauſe it has, in ſome degree, been ſuperſeded, by what has been ſaid of Chriſt as the "Prince of Peace;" and partly, becauſe the excellency of this appellation will be further evinced by what we have to obſerve,

Secondly, on the exerciſe of this benign character, by giving "repentance and forgiveneſs of "ſins."

Theſe are the two great bleſſings of the Goſpel, and they compriſe the whole of experimental and practical religion; for repentance comprehends the renovation of the heart, and the reformation of the conduct, as the neceſſary reſult of ſuch renovation.

* Pſal. xlix. 7. † Eph. i. 11.

And the forgiveneſs of ſins brings the knowledge of reconciliation with God, peace of conſcience, with all thoſe glorious privileges which fill the ſoul with "joy unſpeakable, and full of glory."* We may alſo perceive that they are inſeparably connected; for wherever the grace of repentance is afforded, there will certainly follow the pardon of ſin; but remiſſion of ſins is never beſtowed upon the impenitent. The manner in which they are mentioned in the text, as the *gift* of Chriſt, ſuggeſts ſome important conſiderations.

1. That the natural depravity of man prevents him from doing meritorious actions acceptable to God, and available for his future happineſs: neither can he, by his own native powers, put himſelf into a proper frame to receive the benefit of pardon. With reſpect to forgiveneſs, there can, I think, be no diſpute; for the very term, forgive, implies a free act of the offended party. For if the offender has any merit, ſo far as that merit goes, he has a claim upon the *juſtice* of God; which at once deſtroys the very nature of mercy, and makes the whole work of Chriſt, as a Saviour, of no effect, and totally unneceſſary; "for if righteouſneſs come by the law, then "Chriſt is dead in vain: and if there had been a "law given, which could have given life, verily, "righteouſneſs ſhould have been by the law."† "Therefore St. Paul argues, "By the deeds of the "law ſhall no fleſh be juſtified in the ſight of God; "but

* 1. Peter, i. 8. † Gal. ii. 21. & iii. 21.

" but he hath ſet forth the Lord Jeſus Chriſt to be a " propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare " his righteouſneſs, for the remiſſion of ſins; by " which he may be juſt, and the juſtifier of him who " believeth in Jeſus. Therefore we conclude that " a man is juſtified by faith, without the deeds of the " law."*

2. With regard to repentance, perhaps ſomething may be urged, that it may at leaſt, in ſome degree, be in a man's own power. This, I know, is a faſhionable, and rather a favorite ſentiment; and I doubt not, adopted by many upon good motives. They may think, that to repreſent man incapable, without divine aſſiſtance, of ſpiritual actions, has a tendency to make ſinners careleſs and ſecure; for they may ſay, " if we can do nothing without grace, " it is in vain for us to ſtrive; we muſt wait for that " grace, and in the mean time we will go on in our " old courſes." But ſuppoſing any man capable of reaſoning in this manner, yet it is nothing to the purpoſe, for the arguments of men, however ſpecious, cannot ſet aſide the doctrine of Revelation. And perhaps a concluſion equally forcible may be drawn from the contrary tenet: for a ſinner may reaſon thus; " If repentance be within my reach now, it " may be hereafter, I will therefore put it off, till " ſickneſs or old age render me incapable of enjoy- " ing the pleaſures of ſin any longer."

The truth is, the doctrines of ſcripture are liable to be perverted by wicked men. But yet the fault is not

* Rom. iii. 25. 28.

not in the doctrines, but in the perverters: and therefore no doctrine is to be rejected or concealed, for fear the corrupt heart of man ſhould turn to poiſon, that which is calculated to nouriſh the ſoul unto life everlaſting; any more than food and raiment is to be refuſed by good men, becauſe theſe providential gifts are frequently abuſed by the voluptuous and vain. Repentance, then, is poſitively ſaid to be the gift of Chriſt; and, indeed, it muſt be ſo, if we conſider the real nature of it: Is it not a change of *mind?* and therefore called, "circumciſion of the "heart; regeneration; a new creature; the new "man." All which expreſſions clearly prove a divine agency in the production of it; and juſtify our venerable reformers in teaching us to pray to God for "repentance and his holy ſpirit."

3. If repentance be ſuch a change, then mere reformation falls very ſhort of it. Various worldly reaſons may induce the wicked to alter their conduct. The loſs of health, or property, or the common infirmities of life, may effect an outward change, whilſt the heart remains devoted to ſin; and could the means and power of gratification be reſtored, they would "return, like the dog, to his "vomit, and the ſow, that was waſhed, to her "wallowing in the mire."* Little or nothing is done till the heart is affected; the "axe muſt be laid to the "root"† of corruption; for it is of ſmall moment to pick off the leaves, or cut down the branches, if the

* 2. Peter, ii. 22. † Mat. iii. 10.

the root remain intire: in the ſeaſon of temptation it will ſprout again, and perhaps with increaſed viguor.

4. Repentance being the work of God, it follows, that it is an effectual and a good work; for all his works are ſuch. A holy living principle is implanted in the ſoul, which manifeſts itſelf in every poſſible way. There is hatred of ſin, love to God, and true conformity to his will, diſplayed in a life of obedience and reſignation. The deſires of a penitent man are holy deſires; his actions are holy actions; "old things are paſſed away, and behold all things "are become new."* True repentance is not partial or temporary; but is ſettled and abiding; ſparing no ſin, however pleaſing or habitual; but mortifying every inordinate "affection and luſt;" avoiding not only the occaſion, or temptation to evil, but the very appearance of it. It is a living ſeed which remains in the heart; and, under divine influence, is abundantly productive of good fruits, which are, by "Jeſus Chriſt, to the praiſe and glory "of God."†

But I proceed to conſider,

Thirdly, That miniſters are witneſſes of the dignity, authority, and grace of Chriſt to mankind; "we are his witneſſes of theſe things." This was eminently true, with regard to the Apoſtles: they were choſen for this purpoſe, to teſtify of Chriſt, as the promiſed Meſſiah to the Jews; and the "deſire "of all nations"‡ to the Gentiles. And they were admirably

* 2 Cor. v. 17. † Phil. i. 11. ‡ Hag. ii. 7.

admirably qualified for this work, by the gift of univerſal language, and the power of working miracles, to confirm their teſtimony. Theſe endowments were neceſſary for them at that time; for the doctrine of the Goſpel ſtruck at the ancient ſuperſtitions, and corrupt manners of bigotted and intereſted prieſts, as well as the prejudices of a blind and vicious laity. The arm of the Lord was therefore made bare, and ſucceſs, in a wonderful degree, accompanied their miniſtrations. The Goſpel, through them, and their immediate ſucceſſors (who were endowed with nearly the ſame powers) had an extenſive ſpread, and obtained a complete eſtabliſhment in the world, which the "gates of hell have never "been able to overthrow."*

This point being gained, the miraculous powers were withdrawn, as no longer neceſſary; for had they been continued through ſucceeding ages of the Church, their frequent and perpetual repetition would have deſtroyed their efficacy, and they would probably have been treated as things of courſe; yea, it is poſſible modern philoſophers and infidels, might have boldly affirmed they were the effect of natural, though, perhaps, hidden cauſes, which were no proof of a Divine Revelation, any more than the ſecret phænomena of nature. Preachers of later times have therefore more advantage, by appealing to the well-atteſted miracles of antiquity, than if thoſe qualifications were ſtill veſted in themſelves.

* Math. xvi. 18.

ſelves. But though the outward confirmation of the truth, by ſigns and wonders, be witheld, yet the truth itſelf is the ſame, and is ſtill commanded to be preached; and Chriſt has promiſed to be with the diſpenſors of it, to apply and confirm it to the heart, to the "end of the world."*

The matter, then, of the Goſpel miniſtry is not altered ſince the Apoſtolic age; and miniſters are to this day witneſſes of the dignity, authority, and grace of Chriſt to mankind. Theſe things being premiſed, I beg to call your attention to two or three obſervations on this character of miniſters, as witneſſes for Chriſt.

1. The firſt thing neceſſary in a true witneſs, is a perſonal knowledge of the fact, or facts, which may be the ſubject of his teſtimony. The Apoſtles conſtantly related the general circumſtances of the incarnation, life, death, reſurrection, and exaltation of Jeſus in their ſermons and apologies; affirming that thoſe circumſtances were the accompliſhment of the purpoſes of God, formerly made known to the prophets, for the ſalvation of mankind. They were eye-witneſſes of the truth of what they aſſerted, and had felt the power and excellency of their doctrines by happy experience. Miniſters, therefore, ſhould be well acquainted with the truth of God, and by a perſonal enjoyment of the bleſſings of it, be firmly perſuaded of its reality and importance. It was a reproach to Nicodemus, that though he was a "maſter of Iſrael,"† yet he was ignorant of the firſt "principles

* Matt. xxviii. 20. † John iii. 10.

principles of the religion he was a profeſſed teacher of. We read of others, alſo, who aſſumed the character of public inſtructors, "who knew not what "they ſaid, nor whereof they affirmed."* The miniſters of the Goſpel do truſt in Chriſt, as their own Lord and Saviour. To preach Chriſt is to ſerve him, by promoting his kingdom and glory. To do this truly and faithfully, implies that they are really his diſciples. The Apoſtles declared, "we alſo believe, "and therefore ſpeak;"† for they conceived it inconſiſtent with their profeſſion to be negligent of their own perſonal religion. There were, indeed ſome who "preached Chriſt of contention, not "ſincerely; but others, again, of love."‡ Therefore, all the faithful miniſters of the Goſpel have themſelves been convinced of their own guilt, depravity, and miſery. With theſe impreſſions on their hearts, they have received Chriſt, as he is propoſed in the invitations and promiſes of the goſpel. In ſhort, they have committed their own immortal ſouls into his hands, not doubting but "He will keep "them ſafe until the great day;"§ by faith engaging themſelves unto him, as their ſovereign and gracious Lord. Thus, to preach ſalvation by grace, they firſt prove themſelves true believers, and declare what they have known and felt of him who is their ſpiritual life, being made of "God unto themſelves, "wiſdom, and righteouſneſs, and ſanctification, and "redemption."‖

1. Again,

* 1. Tim. i. 17. † 2. Cor. iv. 13. ‡ Phil. i. 16. § 2. Tim. i. 12. ‖ 1. Cor. i. 30.

2. Again, miniſters, as witneſſes for Chriſt, muſt be perſuaded that they are truly called to the ſacred office of inviting their fellow mortals to partake of the bleſſings of the Goſpel. All true believers have, more or leſs, both a knowledge and experience of divine truth; yet all are not ordained to be public witneſſes of what they have known and felt, otherwiſe than by a diſplay of its influence in their holy lives. But ſome are appointed to this important ſervice, not, indeed, as the Apoſtles were, immediately by Chriſt himſelf, and ſupernaturally qualified to fulfill their heavenly miſſion; yet they can, with ſome pleaſing ſatisfaction, diſcover their appointment, in the common methods of Divine Providence; their inclinations and will being directed and determined to this public employ, for the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind; poſſeſſing ſome competent meaſure of natural and acquired abilities. Their ſerious and careful attention to providential circumſtances, added to their own fervent prayers, joined with the advice and trial of their ſuperiors in wiſdom, experience, and authority, they humbly conceive are ſo many intimations of the divine will, that they conclude, at leaſt with a moral certainty, that they have a proper commiſſion to propagate the everlaſting Goſpel. Then they willingly undertake the awful employ, and feel their hearts animated to it by the principles of love and gratitude, conſtantly viewing their ſacred function as high and honorable, always endeavouring to make full "proof of their "miniſtry."

" miniſtry,"* not merely as their bounden duty, but alſo the ſource of their moſt exalted pleaſures.

Laſtly, Miniſters, as witneſſes, are required to be faithful; or to declare the whole truth, without reſerve. It is very obſervable, that the epithets in Scripture applied to miniſters, generally, if not always, convey the idea of faithfulneſs. They are ſtiled " ambaſſadors, ſtewards, watchmen, ſhep-" herds, witneſſes, &c." all which appellations ſtrongly mark their true character, as the faithful ſervants of God. They are required to be faithful to their divine maſter, for he expreſsly declares, " the law of truth muſt be in their mouth, and " iniquity far from their lips." And when the " prieſts lips keep knowledge, and they ſeek the " law at his mouth, walking with him in peace and " equity, then they turn many away from iniquity, " and prove themſelves the meſſengers of the Lord " of Hoſts."† St. Paul could ſay, that he had not " ſhunned to declare the whole counſel of God,"‡ though his fidelity expoſed him to contempt, reproach, and perſecution. The charge of ſouls is an awful charge. If they " periſh for lack of know-" ledge,"§ the paſtor is accountable, though the flock " die in their iniquity."‖ When, therefore, we conſider that our own ſouls, as well as the ſouls of our people, are at ſtake, in the right diſcharge of our miniſterial duty, it behoves us to be diligent and watchful: " to take heed unto ourſelves, and to our " doctrine;

* 2. Tim. iv. 5. † Malachi, ii. 6, 7. ‡ Acts, xx. 27
§ Hoſ. iv. 6. ‖ Ezek. iii. 18.

" doctrine; to continue in them; for in doing this " we ſhall both ſave ourſelves, and them that hear " us."*

Will you now ſuffer me, my reverend brethren and fathers in the miniſtry, to " ſtir up your minds by " way of remembrance;†" that as we are called to be faithful witneſſes for Chriſt, in a general way among our reſpective charges; ſo are we, I think, eſpecially excited to more than ordinary diligence and zeal at the preſent important criſis;—from the prevalence of error;—the aboundings of iniquity;—and from the judgments of God which are now in the world.

Infidelity, in former times, was chiefly confined to a few, and they principally of the higher orders of civil ſociety, whoſe wiſdom and worldly policy taught them to keep their tenets to themſelves, rather than propagate their opinions amongſt inferior claſſes, knowing they were not favorable to the well-being of political communities. But their ſucceſſors of the preſent day, do not follow their footſteps in this particular; but promote their nefarious creeds with all their ability and zeal; and imagine they have ſucceeded ſo far, in their wicked enterprize, upon the public mind, as boaſtingly to call this the " Age of Reaſon." Revolution appears to be their aim, for they are crafty enough to know, that if religious obligations are weakened, the bonds of civil ſociety will ſoon give way; for if the belief of a future ſtate be removed, or that men will not be accountable

* 1. Tim. iv. 16. † 2. Pet. i. 13.

accountable, in that ſtate, for their preſent actions; human laws loſe all their force, and we may bid an everlaſting farewell to all public and ſocial virtue. The principal antidote to this, and all other poiſons of the ſame nature, is for the miniſters of Chriſt to be more than ever zealous in the cauſe of their divine maſter.

The doctrines, precepts, and obligations of revealed religion, ſhould be made level to the capacities of the meaneſt and moſt illiterate of their hearers, and applied with all ſincerity and faithfulneſs to "every man's conſcience in the ſight of "God."* The preaching of truth is always the beſt mode to confute error; therefore, by being witneſſes for Chriſt, we ſhall prove ourſelves not only his true ſervants, but alſo faithful ſubjects to the ſtate, and a bleſſing to the community.

It was hinted juſt now that iniquity abounded; the fact itſelf needs no proof. We muſt know, from common obſervation, that morality is at a very low ebb: a general corruption of manners prevails; inſomuch that the prophet's deſcription of ancient Iſrael is too applicable to our times: "There is "no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God (in a "reverential way) in the land; by ſwearing, and "lying, and killing, and ſtealing, and committing "adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth "blood."† Where is the happy city, or town, or hamlet, where the ſabbath is revered and ſanctified! where holineſs is the general characteriſtic of the inhabitants

* 2. Cor. iv. 2. † Hoſea, iv. 1, 2.

habitants, and vice and immorality are put to the bluſh? Alas, they are not to be found. The enormities, therefore, of the age, cry aloud to the miniſters of the ſanctuary, to "preach the word; to be inſtant "in ſeaſon out of ſeaſon; to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long ſuffering and doctrine;"* eſpecially ſince God, as it were, is now ſaying, "ſhall I not viſit for theſe things, ſaith the Lord; "and ſhall not my ſoul be avenged on ſuch a nation "as this?"†

The Lord hath evidently a controverſy with the nations. We are not exempt from his indignation, though bleſſed be his name, we do not feel ſo much of his ſeverity as ſome others, though, perhaps, equally involved in guilt. The hemiſphere of Chriſtendom hath been, and ſtill is overſpread with a thick cloud. Very unuſual occurrences have happened, which have amazed and confounded all thinking men. A party has ariſen ſuddenly, and almoſt imperceptibly, in a neighbouring country, with an avowed determination to overthrow all the religious and political eſtabliſhments of the world; and to build anarchy and atheiſm upon their ruins. We have ſeen them accompliſh their deſigns in a conſiderable degree; in the utter ſubverſion of the ancient government of their own country, and as much as they could in the abolition of all religious ſentiment, with the obſervation of all ſacred rites, whether commanded or traditional,‡ which might preſerve

* 2. Tim. iv. 2. † Jer. v. 9.

‡ The author wiſhes to be underſtood as not vindicating the mummeries of Popery; for he conſiders the folly of that profeſſion

preſerve alive the knowledge of the Creator of the World, and the moral obligation of the love and ſervice of his rational creatures. We have heard of their wading through torrents of blood, and exerciſing every ſpecies of cruelty, to gain their ends. Their native land hath been bleeding at every pore, and, in the ſtrife of oppoſing parties, the chiefs have frequently falling victims to their own dark policy. An expenſive and bloody war has been waged againſt almoſt all the powers of Europe, and, ſtrange to tell, upon the whole hath been attended with wonderful ſucceſs. Thouſands, and tens of thouſands, on all ſides, have been cut off in the conteſt; and it yet rages with violence; and to what extent its ravages may go, the wiſeſt of men are unable to determine

feſſion, together with the profligacy of the prieſthood, among the chief but remote cauſes of the revolution. But what he condemns, is the abrogation of every thing that bore the ſemblance of religion both good and bad; and the introduction of principles and rites totally repugnant to revelation and good order. The ſacrifice of the maſs might have been put down, without the exaltation of the Goddeſs of Reaſon; the dreams of purgatory, without conſidering death as an eternal ſleep; the obſervance of a multiplicity of holidays, without the abolition of a commanded ſabbath; the worſhip of the image of the Virgin Mary, without the elevation of a living idol, which they called the Goddeſs of Liberty. However, what has happened in France, affords an important leſſon to the Clergy of all countries and communities, *viz.* to beware how they adopt ſpurious principles, and how they degrade their ſacred function by diſſolute manners. They are intended for public utility, and therefore ought to ſpeak and act as the ſervants of God, for the welfare of mankind.

* Joſiah, l. 16, 17.

determine or conjecture. Here, then, let us pauſe—and try if we cannot diſcover the arm of the Lord's vengeance lifted up, to puniſh wicked and ungrateful nations; and ſo much of this dreadful calamity as hath fallen to our ſhare, we may truly deplore, although our juſt due. What are we, then, as miniſters of the word to do? Why, ſurely, to warn the vicious and ungodly of their evil way, if they wiſh to avert the vengeance of Heaven: to exhort them to "put away the evil of their doings; to ceaſe "to do evil, and learn to do well."* Let us earneſtly entreat them, in the Lord's name, and according to his own directions, in the book of Joel: "there-"fore alſo now, ſaith the Lord, turn ye even to *me*, "with all your *heart*, and with faſting, and with "weeping, and with mourning; and rend your "*heart*, and not your *garments*, and turn unto the "Lord your God;" hoping to find a favorable reception, becauſe "he is gracious and merciful, "ſlow to anger, and of great kindneſs, and re-"penteth him of the evil. Who knoweth but he "will return, and leave a bleſſing behind him?

Finally, let the "prieſts, the miniſters of the "Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; and "let them ſay, ſpare thy people, O Lord, and "give not thine heritage to reproach, that the "Heathen ſhould rule over them; wherefore ſhould "they ſay among the people, where is their God?"†

* Iſaiah. i. 16, 17. † Joel, ii. 12, 13, 14, and 17.

FINIS.